

ALLIANCE UNIVERSITY

YAHWEH CREATOR AND COUNTERCULTURAL: AN IN DEPTH LOOK AT THE
CREATION NARRATIVE IN THE ANE

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INTRODUCTION

Introduction to Comparative Studies

Comparative studies have been used for many years to compare different texts in order to gain understanding and learn more about a text. According to Walton,

Comparative study is used in two very different sorts of scholarly contexts and poses its own unique challenges to each one. On the one hand, it is one of the tools used by critical scholars in the scientific study of the text, particularly in historical and literary criticism... On the other hand, comparative study is a tool used in confessional contexts and likewise often pulls in a different direction than confessional scholarship has traditionally gone.¹

Comparative studies can have different roles in what it is used for.² In this paper comparative study will be used in order to enlighten the Biblical text and demonstrate something about God, Yahweh.

Key Passages

The key passages that this paper will explore are from the creation narrative in the Ancient Near Eastern text of *Enuma Elish* and the creation narrative in Genesis. In *Enuma Elish* the passage that will be focused on is Tablet VI and the passage of Genesis that it will be compared to is Genesis 1:26-2:7. Particularly, what will be focused on is the sections of these narratives where humankind is created.

Thesis

¹ John H. Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament: Introducing the Conceptual World of the Hebrew Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2018), 19.

² *Ibid.*, 28.

The comparison of Tablet VI of *Enuma Elish* and Genesis 1:26-2:7 demonstrates that the Bible is countercultural to the other Ancient Near Eastern religions in how they view their creator and their relationship to human creation.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Enuma Elish – An Introduction

Enuma Elish is an ancient Mesopotamian text found on seven clay tablets³ that is labeled as a creation epic in *The Ancient Near East: An Anthology of Texts & Pictures*.⁴ There is no general date agreed upon as of when the text was composed, but many would assign it to the Old Babylonian Period which is the early part of the second millennium B.C..⁵ Additionally, the author is unknown, but it is suggested that it was written by the priest of Marduk.⁶ The text gets its name from the opening lines, “EnumaElish', meaning 'when on high’”.⁷ This text was a significant religious literature of Mesopotamia as, “it was recited with due solemnity on the fourth day of the New Year’s festival.”⁸ This epic documents not only the creation of the universe, but also “the struggle between cosmic order and chaos”.⁹ The purpose of the composition of *Enuma Elish* was to justify the installment of Marduk as the head of the

³ Babatunde A. Ogunlana, “Inspiration and the Relationship between Genesis 1:1-2:4A and Enuma Elish” *BTSK Insight* 13 (October 2016), 87.

⁴ James B. Pritchard, ed., *The Ancient Near East: An Anthology of Texts and Pictures* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011), 28.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Ogunlana, “Inspiration and the Relationship between Genesis 1:1-2:4A and Enuma Elish,” 88.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 87.

⁸ Pritchard, *The Ancient Near East*, 28.

⁹ *Ibid.*

Mesopotamian pantheon by displacing the god Enlil.¹⁰ In this epic it is seen that Marduk stars as creator for the first time and that major creations originate from destruction.¹¹

Marduk

In order to better understand the text of *Enuma Elish*, it is important to understand the main characters, gods, in this creation epic. The main god in this text that is important to know is the god Marduk. As stated before, Marduk was the head of the Babylonian pantheon and the patron god of Babylon.¹² Marduk was the son of Ea and was the king of the gods and as seen in *Enuma Elish*, Marduk was seen as a creator god.¹³ Marduk was the god that had the idea of creation, but it was his father, Ea, who carried out the creation.¹⁴

Ea

Ea, Marduk's father, was known for his cunning nature and, "he is the third of the significant triad along with Anu and Enlil."¹⁵ He was known as the god of wisdom, which also meant the god of magic, omens and divination.¹⁶ He also was the patron God of Eridu which was known as the "first city".¹⁷ Ea was also known to often take on the role of advocate for humankind, but unfortunately was not always consistently benevolent.¹⁸

Enlil

¹⁰ Andrea Seri, "The Role of Creation in Enūma Eliš," *Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Religions* 12, no. 1 (2012), 5.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹² John H. Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament*, 321.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Andrea Seri, "The Role of Creation in Enūma Eliš," 17.

¹⁵ John H. Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament*, 318.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

Enlil, the god that Marduk displaces,¹⁹ was first known to succeed his father Anu and become head of the pantheon, a position that he holds in the *Tale of Anzu* and the epics of *Gilgamesh and Atrahasis*.²⁰ He was patron of the city of Nippur and has cosmic association with wind and the weather.²¹ He also was known to have appointed gods to their positions and granted kingship under his father's authority.²²

Genesis – An Introduction

Genesis contains the creation story of the Israelites and is known as the book of beginnings.²³ As Hill & Walton states, it “contains the foundation for much of the theology of the Old Testament.”²⁴ The book does not identify an author, but traditionally it has been attributed to Moses.²⁵ Even though tradition has tied it to Moses, there is not enough evidence to truly connect Moses as author of Genesis.²⁶ Many scholars will say that it is composed from a Yahwistic source (J-source) and the Priestly source (P-source).²⁷ As Ogunlana states, “The J-source was compiled between 1000 and 900 BC by a group of prophets in Judah. Thus, the J-source was written during the early monarchial period. The P-source was compiled between 600 and 500 BC by the priests.”²⁸ For the specific passage being analyzed in this paper, it is believed by some scholars that this text can be assigned to the P-source, which would date this to be 600 and 500 BC, which is postexilic.²⁹ Per Hill and Walton, the purpose of this book is to begin the story of

¹⁹ Seri, “The Role of Creation in Enūma Eliš,” 5.

²⁰ Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament*, 318.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Andrew E Hill and John H. Walton, *A Survey of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2009), 78.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ogunlana, “Inspiration and the Relationship between Genesis 1:1-2:4A and Enuma Elish,” 90.

²⁸ Ibid., 90-91.

²⁹ Ibid., 91.

the Covenant and with the covenant it was to “allow him [Yahweh] to use Israel to give people an accurate picture of what he was like.”³⁰ The beginning of Genesis details the creation of the universe and humankind and gives readers an understanding of who the creator, Yahweh, is.

Yahweh

Yahweh was the God of Israel who is found to be the, “sovereign creator of a world made especially for human habitation.”³¹ Yahweh was the one and only God of the Israelites and believed to be the only one responsible for establishing the roles of the cosmos.³² He was creator of all things and the one to establish a covenant with Abraham’s family.³³

COMPARISON OF THE TEXTS

Similarities of the Texts

Though it is easy to note all the differences between these two texts there is much to be gained from identifying the similarities between the two when doing a comparative study. Some similarities that they have is that they are written in the same literary context and world.³⁴ As Ogunlana stated, “they share the same literary context and written in the same world. The writers of the two texts used the literary type and linguistic viewpoint which were common and acceptable in their time.”³⁵ Knowing this information gives great insight in how to interpret both texts and understand what was important in that culture and in that time. Additionally, both texts have a lot of similarity in how they discuss the creation of the earth in the use of wind, the

³⁰ Hill and Walton, *A Survey of the Old Testament*, 77.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 82-83.

³² *Ibid.*, 83.

³³ *Ibid.*, 82.

³⁴ Ogunlana, “Inspiration and the Relationship between Genesis 1:1-2:4A and Enuma Elish,” 95.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

separation of sky and ground, and both address the creation of the sky, ground, light and man.³⁶

From this it is seen that both texts are trying to address how the universe came into existence (including the human race) and address how God or their gods had a role to play in all of it.

From this it is revealed the characteristics of these gods and what the purposes of humankind are.

Differences of the Texts

As stated above it can be easy to spot all the differences in these texts. In the following sections the major differences between these two texts will be outlined and in turn will help to show how the Biblical text of Genesis is countercultural to the rest of the Ancient Near East.

The Purpose of the Texts

From the introductions of these two texts, it is evident that the purposes of these two texts are different. In *Enuma Elish*, the purpose of the text was to elevate Marduk as the chief God in Babylonia.³⁷ As Seri states in “The Role of Creation in Enūma Eliš”, that “it becomes apparent that Enuma Elis was composed to justify the installation of Marduk as the head of the Mesopotamian pantheon by displacing the god Enlil.”³⁸ The text in *Enuma Elish* displays the power of Marduk. Specifically, in Tablet VI it says, “Opening his [Marduk’s] mouth, he addresses Ea to impart the plan he had conceived in his heart”.³⁹ In this moment, Marduk is about to tell of the plan he has for creating humans and to have Ea execute. This shows the power of Marduk to not only create, but to have his own Father do it on his behalf. Shows how he can persuade even a god from the original triad⁴⁰ to execute his idea.

³⁶ Ibid., 97.

³⁷ Ibid., 88.

³⁸ Seri, “The Role of Creation in Enūma Eliš,” 5.

³⁹ Pritchard, *The Ancient Near East*, 33.

⁴⁰ Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament*, 318.

In the book of Genesis, the purpose is different. As stated before, Genesis begins the story of the Covenant and with the covenant it was to “allow him [Yahweh] to use Israel to give people an accurate picture of what he was like.”⁴¹ The text has similar elements to *Enuma Elish* in that it does demonstrate the power of Yahweh as he creates the universe as He gives form and function. The big difference is that the purpose is not necessarily to justify Yahweh being the patron god of a city or to show his great might. Instead, it shows who Yahweh is, this is through the creation narrative and eventually His covenant with Israel. In turn this demonstrates how He is a relational God who seeks to show people His kindness, goodness, faithfulness, graciousness and mercy.

What Humans Were Composed Of

Both texts address what humankind was made of and this says something about how the people viewed their gods and themselves. In *Enuma Elish* Tablet VI, Mardu says to Ea, “Blood I will mass and cause bones to be. I will establish a savage, ‘man’ shall be his name.”⁴² In this it can be seen that man is made from blood. In Genesis, it mentions a different substance used in making man. In Genesis 2:7 (NIV) it says, “Then the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.” From this it is seen that man is made up of dust and then the breath of Yahweh, which is different than the *Enuma Elish* account. According to Walton, “Though there are numerous common motifs, there is no consensus in the ancient Near East concerning what humans are made of.”⁴³ Therefore, one should not be surprised that these accounts would be different, but one should look into what was significant in which materials were used to create man. An interesting thing

⁴¹ Hill and Walton, *A Survey of the Old Testament*, 77.

⁴² Pritchard, *The Ancient Near East*, 33.

⁴³ Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament*, 175.

to note is that in the Genesis account, there is no physical element provided by the deity.⁴⁴ As Walton states, “The breath, as in Egyptian accounts, is not part of Deity, though it indicates that Deity is the source of life.”⁴⁵ Dust is an interesting element to be used as unlike clay, dust cannot be molded and it is not fertile.⁴⁶ Also, Walton states that dust, “represents a connection to the earth only in death.”⁴⁷ It is interesting that it is what Yahweh chose to use to create humankind and it reflects some of what the Israelites thought of themselves. One thing that is evident is that they understand that Yahweh is their source of their life and without Him they are nothing. They know that “all people are connected to the ground and are mortal (made of dust).”⁴⁸ In *Enuma Elish*, it is just blood that is used. Walton explains that materials actually serve to address some archetypal issues and that typically, “blood and flesh of the deity signify the connection to the deity.”⁴⁹ What is interesting though is that the blood used to fashion humankind was the blood of a god that was slain. As Seri states, “Once again creation is done through destruction, because Qingu was slaughtered and his blood was used to fashion humankind.”⁵⁰ So humankind had connection to a deity, but not the one who had the idea or actually formed them.

Another thing to note in regards to what humans were composed of is that in Genesis it is more about human identity, rather than the account of human origins.⁵¹ In Genesis it is found that Adam and Eve are, “connected to Deity in their role only, not by their ingredients.”⁵² In ancient Near Eastern texts like *Enuma Elish* they, “speak of a collective archetype that is connected to deity by being made of divine ingredients and that does corvée labor for the gods.”⁵³ From this it

⁴⁴ Ibid., 176.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 176-177.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 177.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 178.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 180.

⁵⁰ Seri, “The Role of Creation in Enūma Eliš,” 17.

⁵¹ Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament*, 178.

⁵² Ibid., 179.

⁵³ Ibid., 178.

is seen that a difference in what they are composed of also shows a difference in how they view humankind and what is their purpose.

Purpose of Humans

From the previous section it is clear that there is a difference in how these two texts convey what is the purpose of humankind. In *Enuma Elish*, Marduk says, “Verily, savage-man I will create. He shall be charged with the service of the gods.”⁵⁴ It is clear here that man is created to serve the gods so that they might be “at ease”. As Walton states, “Sumerian and Akkadian sources consistently portray people as having been created to do the work of the gods-work that is essential for the continuing existence of the gods, and work that the gods have tired of doing for themselves.”⁵⁵ Additionally, it was commonly known in Mesopotamian texts that creation of humans was an afterthought.⁵⁶ In Genesis it is a very different way that Yahweh sees the creation of mankind and how the Israelites saw their purpose. In Genesis 1: 26-27 (NIV),

Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.” So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

From this it is seen that Yahweh had made man in His image and that he gave them the role of ruling over and taking care of the creation He had made. In Israel they believed that the reason that they were created was to serve Yahweh, but not because He needed them or had work He didn’t want to do. Instead, “the difference was that they saw humanity as being given a priestly role in a sacred space rather than as slave labor to meet the needs of deity.”⁵⁷ Also, it is seen that Yahweh planted a garden to provide for His people rather than having His people provide for

⁵⁴ Pritchard, *The Ancient Near East*, 33.

⁵⁵ Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament*, 186.

⁵⁶ Hill and Walton, *A Survey of the Old Testament*, 83.

⁵⁷ Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament*, 186.

Him.⁵⁸ All throughout the Bible these ideas are reinforced about how humankind serves as a priestly role, how they were not an afterthought and how Yahweh provides for His people. Something that Walton makes clear in his chapter that explores human origins and roles in the ancient Near East is that Israel believed that the cosmos functioned for people. He goes on to further state that, “God [Yahweh] does not need the cosmos, but has determined to dwell in it, making it sacred space; it functions for people.”⁵⁹ From this it is very clear that the text of *Enuma Elish* and Genesis look at the purpose of humankind very differently, which demonstrates the difference in how these people groups looked at themselves and their creator.

CONCLUSION

Through the comparative study of these two texts it can be seen that there are differences in these texts that show distinction between the people of Israel and the ancient Near East. It is clear that in how they view mankind and their creator shows that the Bible and the people of Israel were countercultural to their neighbors in the ancient Near East. As seen in the introductions it is clear that one distinction is that Israel only believed in one God, while the surrounding areas, specifically Mesopotamia believed in multiple gods. There was also a difference in how they saw their identity and purpose that was countercultural to the ANE world. In *Enuma Elish* humankind came from the blood of a slain deity, which meant that they were made out of destruction.⁶⁰ Genesis denotes that humankind did not come from war or destruction, but instead came from the dust of the earth and the breath of God (Genesis 2:7), which demonstrated the connection to the earth and that Yahweh was their source of life.⁶¹ Lastly, we see that the Bible is countercultural in how they see their purpose. For the Israelites, they saw humankind in a

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 187.

⁶⁰ Seri, “The Role of Creation in Enūma Eliš,” 17.

⁶¹ Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament*, 176.

priestly role, not as slave labor and not as an afterthought.⁶² In *Enuma Elish* it is clear they are made to serve the gods to meet their needs and wants.⁶³

All in All, this countercultural view shows a God who cares very deeply for His people and overall greater than any other god. This in turn sheds light on the text in Genesis by revealing the character of Yahweh. For He demonstrates His power in how he created the universe and brought about life. He creates man in His own image and graciously provides for them everything that they need. As we see further in Genesis, even though the first people mess up and sin against Him, He lovingly, graciously and mercifully makes a way back to relationship with Him and makes a covenant. He makes rules not to be harsh, but to show people His holiness and what is required to be in His presence. Eventually, through Jesus He puts an end to the power of sin and death, which means mankind can be in right relationship with Him. What is truly countercultural is that Yahweh is a God who wants relationship with His people. He loves His people so immensely and demonstrates that through His words and actions. The same cannot be said for the gods of Mesopotamia. Living with the knowledge of who Yahweh is and walking in His love is evidently countercultural.

⁶² Ibid., 186-187.

⁶³ Ibid., 186.

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